

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CPR-01 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05

CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SCCT-01 EB-07

OC-06 CCO-00 /079 W

----- 077000

O 301601Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8342

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 1247

E. O. GDS

TAGS: PINT, MA

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER KILLED IN HELICOPTER CRASH

REF: TANANARIVE 1245

1. AS OF 7 P.M. LOCAL JULY 30, PUBLIC HAS NOT YET BEEN INFORMED OF PRIME MINISTER'S DEATH.

2. FOLLOWING TRANSMISSION OF REFTEL, WE WERE INFORMED BY SOURCE WHOSE RELIABILITY HAS NOT BEEN ESTABLISHED THAT SOVIET HELICOPTER "EXPLODED" DURING FLIGHT. SAME SOURCE STATED THAT GENDARMERIE MAJOR RAKOTOARIJAONA, MEMBER OF SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (CSR) WAS ALSO ABOARD AND PRESUMABLY KILLED.

3. OVER PAST FEW DAYS WE HAD RECEIVED SPATE OF RUMORS MAKING THE ROUNDS IN TANANARIVE, IN ADDITION, A NUMBER OF POLITICAL TRACTS ARE CIRCULATING. RUMORS CAN BE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:

A. THERE ARE MOVEMENTS AFOOT AMONG MILITARY AND OR
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GENDARMERIE TO OVERTURN THE GOVERNMENT.

B. A. CSR MEMBER HAS BEEN IMPRISONED. SOME SOURCES IDENTIFY HIM AS RAKOTOARIJAONA, OTHER SOURCES IDENTIFY HIM AS GILBERT SAMBSON, DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF NATIONAL SECURITY JUNE 1972-JANUARY 1976.

C. SEVERAL OFFICERS (OR PERHAPS EX-OFFICERS) OF THE POLICHE HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED AS HAVE SOME JOURNALISTS.

D. THE MERINA (THE ETHNIC GROUP IN THE TANANARAIVE-ANTSIRABE AREA OF THE HIGH PLATEAU) ARE RESTIVE OVER FAVORITISM TOWARDS COASTAL PEOPLE.

E. THERE IS INCREASING TENSION BETWEEN THE MILITARY SERVICES AND THE GENDARMERIE.

F. ARMED FORCES WERE PLACED ON ALERT FOR A DAY (SOME SOURCES SAID FOR SEVERAL DAYS).

4. THE VARIOUS TRACTS IN CIRCULATION (A FEW OF WHICH WE HAVE OBTAINED) FOLLOW THESE THEMES:

A. RATSIRAKA HAS SOLD MADAGASCAR TO THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE, STOLEN ELECTIONS (PRESUMABLY THE DECEMBER 1975 REFERENDUM), AND ASSASSINATED FORMER CHIEF OF STATE (FEBRUARY 1975) RATSIMANDRAVA.

B. RATSIRAKA'S BROTHER ETINENNE HAS BOUGHT INTO VARIOUS COMPANIES, A HOTEL, AND COCOA AND COFFEE PLANTATIONS WITH MONEY FROM UNKNOWN SOURCES, IMPLYING THE USE OF OFFICIAL FUNDS PROVIDED BY HIS BROTHER.

C. MANY PEOPLE INCLUDING JOURNALISTS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN IMPRISONED.

D. LEADING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN BRAINWASHING THE PEOPLE TO SUPPORT COMMUNISM.

E. CORRUPTION HAS BECOME RAMPANT.

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F. CHINA AND NORTH KOREA HAVE BEEN SUPPLYING ARMS.

5. WE DID NOT GIVE MUCH CREDENCE TO THE RUMORS SINCE MOST EMANATED FROM FRENCH COMMUNITY AND THOSE MALAGASY CLOSE TO FRENCH. FRENCH HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY NERVOUS OF LATE BECAUSE OF RECENT NATIONALIZATIONS AND CONTINUING UNFRIENDLY GDRM ATTITUDE TOWARD FRENCH. SOME MALAGASY AND EVEN SOVIET AMBASSADOR HAD CAUTIONED RATSIRAKA AGAINST MAKING JUNE TRIP

TO PARIS, PYONGYANG AND PEKING FOR FEAR OF POSSIBLE COUP. HOWEVER, RATSIRAKA FELT CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO DEPART AND TOOK WITH HIM RAKOTOARIJAONA AND SAMBSON; LATTER TWO ARE CONSIDERED TO BE OUTSIDE RATSIRAKA'S INNER CIRCLE. AT NO TIME HAS THERE BEEN ANY UNUSUAL NUMBER OF POLICE OR MILITARY IN EVIDENCE, OR OTHER SIGNS OF NERVOUSNESS, EVEN AT PRESIDENTIAL PALACE.

6. OF LATE THERE HAS BEEN MORE EXPRESSION OF DISCONTENT AMONG MERINA ELITE, MILITARY AND BUSINESS CIRCLES, BUT OUR SOURCES DID NOT INDICATE THAT ANY PLOT WAS BEING HATCHED TO OVERTURN THE GOVERNMENT. RAKOTOMALALA, WHILE NOT CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF RATSIRAKA'S IS NOT KNOWN FOR HIS INITIATIVE AND MAY HAVE BEEN UNWITTING VICTIM OF COUNTER-COUP-PLOTTING, IF HELICOPTER WAS INDEED SABOTAGED. CHIEF OF STAFF RAKOTONIRAINA WAS VERY FRIENDLY TO WESTERN INTERESTS BUT IS NOT CONSIDERED A POSSIBLE RIVAL FOR POWER, ALTHOUGH HE MIGHT HAVE HAD TO FIGURE SOMEHOW IN ANY COUP PLOTTING. MOREOVER, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT A COUP WOULD BE STAGED WHILE GENERAL ANDRIAMAHAZO, INTERIM HEAD OF STATE (FEBRUARY - JUNE 1975 FOLLOWING RATSIMANDRAVA'S ASSASSINATION), WAS OUT OF COUNTRY: HE LEFT FOR ITALY AND FRANCE IN EARLY JULY AND EXPECTED TO RETURN IN ABOUT A WEEK. UNDOUBTEDLY, HIS SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP WOULD HAVE BEEN ESSENTIAL FOR ANY PLOTTERS SINCE HE WOULD MOST LIKELY SIGNAL THOSE NEUTRAL ELEMENTS IN MILITARY WHO WERE UNCERTAIN WHETHER OR NOT TO JOIN COUP-MAKERS.

7. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT RATSIRAKA, HAVING LEARNED OF SOME PLOTTING, DECIDED TO ELIMINATE SUSPECTED RIVAL FOR POWER OR MERELY WANTED TO ASSERT MORE DRASTIC CONTROL OVER COUNTRY. WE RECALL THAT AT TIME OF RATSIMANDRAVA'S ASSASSINATION, MILITARY DIRECTORATE ESTABLISHED STRICT MARTIAL CONFIDENTIAL

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LAW, PROHIBITED ARRIVALS OR DEPARTURES FROM MADAGASCAR, AND CUT OFF ALL COMMUNICATIONS WITH OUTSIDE WORLD. WHILE I DO NOT WISH TO EXAGERRATE CIRCUMSTANCES OF WHICH ONLY MINIMAL AMOUNT OF INFORMATION IS THUS FAR AVAILABLE, WE ARE RUSHING THIS CABLE TO PROVIDE OUR THOUGHTS IN CASE RATSIRAKA AGAIN SEES FIT TO CUT OFF CONTACT WITH OUTSIDE WORLD.

8. AT 7:10 PM RATSIRAKA ANNOUNCED OVER RADIO THAT PRIME MINISTER HAD BEEN KILLED, ADDING THAT HELICOPTER WAS FRENCH-BUILT ALOUETT, NOT SOVIET HELICOPTER AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED.
SHEINBAUM

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Message Attributes

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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To: STATE
Type: TE
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